
What Do Advisory Groups Do?

The mission of advisory groups is to advise, assist and support the school personnel in order to improve planning, operating and evaluating the program area.

In general, advisory committees exist to keep vocational/ technical education in tune with occupational trends. They do this in a variety of ways:

- by advising on equipment and facility use;
- by advising on curriculum and instructional methods;
- by helping to recruit, guide, and advise vocational/technical students;
- by advocating and promoting vocational/technical education with industry and the community; and,
- by helping administrators to plan and evaluate vocational/technical programs.

This chapter offers a “smorgasbord” of activities that might be undertaken by program advisory committees as well as general advisory councils for vocational/technical education. Some require years of discussion and preparation by advisory groups, working with school personnel to address long term needs. Others require only a single meeting and recommendation to school administrators or the school board. Some are small-scale changes that improve a single aspect of a vocational/technical program; others are dramatic alterations that may affect the overall operation of the school, college or skill-center.

The important point is that the critical eyes, creative imaginations, and combined strength of a good advisory group can really make things happen. The examples provided in this chapter are intended to generate ideas for ways to use advisory committees and councils for greatest benefit to an institution.

**...PROVIDE ADVICE
ON NEW
TECHNOLOGY**

Advisory committees review existing equipment, facilities, and resources. The tour of the shop is a highlight of the program advisory committee meeting. Advisors generally consider how closely the school's equipment matches the equipment used in industry: What is obsolete? What is still needed? Is the shop adequately stocked? Are there sufficient materials for all students in the program? The shop tour may generate a series of grant applications and donations that can turn a shop around in relatively short order.

Advisory committees recommend new programs as well as new equipment. Advisors help schools get the best equipment for their needs at reasonable cost. Not only might they suggest purchasing a generic type of equipment — for example, Computer-Assisted Design (CAD) systems for drafting programs or Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) for machine shops — but they often help the instructional staff select from the different products and models available. Advisors may attend several ad hoc meetings to review sales brochures, observe vendors' demonstrations, and compare quotes.

Vocational/technical administrators in Alabama generally concur that some demonstration of advisory committee support is necessary to procure funds for new equipment. Advisors may also be asked to attend school board meetings to support the school's request for funds.

Advisory committees donate materials, equipment, and services to vocational/technical programs. If the advisors themselves cannot supply a certain item, they may direct the school to someone who can. Sometimes advisors encourage their colleagues to donate the needed supplies. Regardless of the source, schools get a better-stocked shop or classroom and the donor businesses may get a welcome tax benefit.

Advisory committees help schools maintain their libraries of visual aids, magazines, textbooks and reference books. Advisors have provided schools with updated parts catalogs and with published regulations (e.g., for hazardous waste disposal). With the advent of videotape equipment, advisors have contributed videotapes to comprehensive occupational libraries in the schools.

**...HELP UPDATE
AND REFINE
THE CURRICULUM**

Advisory committees help develop educational objectives. Sometimes an outside perspective offers new insight on programs that may seem stagnant or unable to keep pace with industry trends. Fresh ideas can help vocational/technical administrators and instructors to place their programs in context and develop new approaches that are more in tune with contemporary expectations.

Advisory committees help to validate task/competency listings for an occupation. These listings provide the foundation for the development of a competency-based vocational/technical program curriculum.

Advisory committees share their expertise on new and developing areas. Change is a constant in the world of vocational/technical education, and advisors can help schools keep pace with the times. They suggest new program areas — such as wastewater treatment or medical office management. And they identify emerging trends in traditional areas — unibody auto construction, computer-assisted drafting, short-order food preparation. Committees often survey the community for job market needs if data is not reliable.

Advisory committees review, evaluate, and advise on the technical content of course materials. Schools have found advisors' input to be helpful in determining whether texts need to be updated or supplemented. Although advisors generally do not select course materials, they may identify occupation-related manuals or catalogues, for example, that are used in their own businesses and would be equally applicable for vocational/ technical training classrooms.

Advisory committees advise on methods of instruction most appropriate for course content. Vocational/technical instructors welcome suggestions that help to hold student interest while advancing the concepts and skills required in the course. Although few advisors have been trained to be teachers, many are in a position to offer unique perspectives from on-the-job training that occurs in their business. Some can identify potential sources of vocational teachers.

Advisory committees help schools to identify skills needed to meet entry-level job requirements. Occupations that are unionized or regulated by the state or industry associations place special emphasis on knowledge of theory and skills required to enter the work force. Advisors representing these occupations can help vocational/technical schools to tailor their programs to ensure ways for schools to use existing facilities and personnel to retrain displaced workers for new occupations, identifying the need for adult education classes in the process.

Advisory committees advise on the extent to which basic skills and work attitudes should be taught. Advisors in the technical shops (e.g., machine shop, electronics, and drafting) have pointed to the need for better preparation in math and computer skills. Some advisors see a need for improved communication skills. And many advisors emphasize the importance of good work attitudes. Much of what committees recommend should be based upon the follow-up of evaluation results noted later in this manual.

Advisory committee members serve as, or arrange for guest speakers. Some advisors have arranged for manufacturers to take their displays to the schools. A drafting advisor may sponsor special workshops for students on the use of drafting film. A chef advisor may demonstrate ice sculpture.

Advisory committees bring special projects to the school. Many schools have initiated successful house-building projects with assistance from several advisory committees: electrical, plumbing, and carpentry. Advisors to auto-body repair shops locate salvage vehicles for students to work on. Carpentry advisory committees devise blueprint projects for students and critique the results. Machine shop committees likewise initiate competitive projects for students and award prizes to the winners.

At meetings of the advisory committees with vocational teachers, advisors contribute to the professional development of instructional staff. By underwriting teachers' membership in industry and trade associations, advisory committees help teachers gain access to technology updates and entree to colleagues in the field. The efforts of advisors may enable teachers to attend conferences or workshops to upgrade their skills. Sometimes advisors sponsor their own tours and workshops for teachers. Moreover, advisors often provide summer employment for teachers to introduce them to technology used in the field and to help upgrade their skills.

...ASSIST WITH RECRUITING AND PLACING STUDENTS

Advisory committees help "sell" vocational/technical education to students. Perhaps one of the most important functions of a program advisor is serving as a role model for students who are considering entering the occupation. This function is most evident when recruiting students for nontraditional occupations and when recruiting special-needs students or academically disadvantaged students.

Advisors frequently speak at assemblies for middle school students to introduce them to vocational/technical education and work opportunities. They also give presentations for exploratory classes. Some schools have asked their advisors to publicize employment potential in slide or film presentations developed for recruitment purposes. Colleges can recruit secondary vocational students in this manner as well.

Advisory committees arrange for occupationally related field trips and other activities. Advisors often open their plants for class tours or observations of the actual operation of a business. Sometimes they allow brief hands-on demonstrations to give students a glimpse of how it would be to do this kind of work.

Advisory committees inform the school of opportunities to place students in full- or part-time jobs or co-op positions. At the secondary level, vocational/technical students especially welcome the chance to try out their new skills and make some money while still in school; when they graduate, they want jobs related to their training. Advisors are aware of job openings, both in their own shops and in those of their colleagues, and can pass this information on to the school's instructional and placement staff. They can also

advise teachers and students of the pay scale to expect upon graduation and of further training available.

Advisory committees inform employers of the availability of trained vocational/technical students. People with no direct link to vocational/technical schools are often totally unaware of the talent that may be available. Helping to publicize the school in this way may, in turn, generate donations and other forms of support and, of course, enlarge the membership of advisory committees.

Advisory committees support student vocational/technical organizations. Advisors serve as judges for competitions and often donate scholarships, awards, or prizes to the top students. Winning a complete tool set can be a valuable incentive for vocational/technical students looking for their first job after graduation.

...GENERATE POSITIVE PUBLIC RELATIONS

Advisory committees help acquaint the community with the needs of vocational/technical education. Advisors can be the school's most effective spokespersons with political groups — not only the school board, but planning boards as well. The views of prominent business leaders tend to carry considerable weight with these policymakers.

Advisors speak to trade or community organizations about their work with vocational/technical programs. Sometimes they place articles in their company or trade newsletters. These public relations activities, in turn, may initiate stories in local print and broadcast media that reflect favorably on both the education institution and the advisors themselves. On occasion, a committee may generate a video showing the vocational program with student work displayed.

Advisory committees seek legislative support for vocational/technical programs. Advisors who are community leaders may have influence with state or federal legislators, and they may be able to speak on behalf of the needs of vocational/technical education generally, or of particular institutions.

Committees may raise program visibility through radio talk shows, displaying student work in their places of business, and in other creative ways. They may even raise funds in this manner.

...ASSIST WITH PROGRAM PLANNING AND EVALUATION

Advisory committees help vocational/technical schools plan and implement new programs. As noted above, advisors sometimes generate ideas for new vocational/technical programs. In addition, advisors can also be closely involved in the actual planning and implementing of those programs. The general advisory council must endorse local plans as reflected in the program application for state and federal funds.

Advisory committees help schools set priorities for budgetary expenditures. When resources are limited, advisors help vocational/technical administrators use their available resources to maximum advantage.

Advisory committees advise schools on trends in the local job market. Advisors from business and industry are in an ideal position to foresee where their own industries are headed and how advances in technology will affect the labor market. Vocational/technical programs can thus capitalize on advisors' insights and knowledge by preparing for shifts in demand for certain types of workers. Representatives from industries other than those of committee members can be invited to share their insights as well.

Advisory committees help schools evaluate the quality of their vocational/technical programs. Assessing how well vocational/technical programs are preparing students to enter the job market can take several forms with advisors assisting in various ways. For example, schools may undertake follow-up surveys of graduates and employers to ascertain what proportion of students remain in their field upon graduation, and to measure employer satisfaction with the quality of training. Often advisors assist with these surveys by suggesting additional questions, proposing ways to encourage cooperation with employers, or reviewing survey results and recommending program changes accordingly. Other kinds of surveys may be done as well. Some advisors have suggested close monitoring of co-op placements to identify and close gaps between the school's training and the needs of employers; with early detection of problems, a school can thus modify a program quickly to benefit current enrollees. And still other advisors have assisted educators by serving as on-site evaluators for evaluations conducted by the Alabama Department of Education.

Advisory committees often review enrollment trends to suggest ways to bolster enrollment in a needed program through scholarships, videos, writeups, and the like.

Advisory committee members can participate in the team reviews of their local programs done periodically by the State Department of Education. By documenting such things as survey results, involvement in planning, and support of the vocational/technical program, the evaluation of the local or institutional program can proceed much smoother. Being available for discussion with the review team is also helpful.

The general advisory council should have participated in the development of the "local application" and have indicated as much by signing that document. This is an excellent opportunity for committees and councils to bring their recommendations to the attention of state officials. Another opportunity to do so is with an annual report to the board or college administration which some committees do.

Program advisory committees and general advisory councils can often establish liaison with nearby community organizations as well as school-based groups — community education, local employment offices, assessment centers, vocational rehabilitation centers, and the like.

Finally, local advisory committees should consider meeting jointly with neighboring school or institutional committees to develop a collaborative spirit and perhaps formal articulation agreements. In some cases, regional advisory councils involving a city and county school system and the local two-year college have been fruitful.

